

Statement
Senator Kent Conrad
Committee on Indian Affairs
Oversight Hearing on the Administration's FY 2003 Budget
March 14, 2002

Mr. Chairman thank you for holding this hearing on the Administration's budget request. I want to highlight two concerns in the area of education.

EDUCATION

United Tribes Technical College

First, I am very concerned that the budget fails to provide funding for United Tribes Technical College located in Bismarck, North Dakota. I am amazed that after more than 20 years of providing operational support for this college, the Administration would yank the rug out from under this school and the more than 500 students that attend it.

UTTC is a unique institution; it is the only intertribally-controlled postsecondary vocational institution in the country, and it has been funded in the President's budget every year since 1981. UTTC provides valuable educational opportunities to students from over 40 tribes across the nation, as well as services for their families. UTTC does not receive assistance under the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act; therefore it is dependant on these BIA funds to keep the school up and running. Without these funds, the President of UTTC has told me that the college may be forced to close its doors. I would like the Administration to explain why it eliminates funds for this college while at the same time it increased funds for BIA's own postsecondary institutions.

Tribal Colleges

I am also disappointed that the Administration has cut funding for the tribal colleges under Title I and II by \$2 million from the FY02 enacted level of \$40 million. Title I & II provides core operational funding for these schools. *College presidents in my state have told me that no other funding is as important to the colleges.*

In North Dakota, I have seen first-hand the profound differences tribal colleges make in Indian Country and the positive impact they have on the lives of young people. Tribal colleges are a lifeline for those living on the reservation, providing not only higher education opportunities, but also hope in an area where the economic outlook is often bleak.

Core operational funding for the tribal colleges allows them to keep their doors open. This funding supports administrative costs, faculty and staff salaries, faculty operations, and other basic services needed to keep the colleges in operation. Other program funds cannot take the place of this very important core funding. Without this core funding, the colleges cannot keep up with general operating expenses. And because stabilized core operational budgets are essential in the accreditation process,

inadequate funding means the colleges risk losing their accreditation and may be forced to close.

Core operational funding levels are still less than two-thirds of the \$6,000 per Indian student level authorized by the Tribally Controlled College or University Act. Tribal colleges serve more than 30,000 students nationwide, but annual increases in appropriations have not kept pace with the increasing enrollments.

Title I tribal colleges also receive significantly less government support than other public institutions. While public institutions receive about \$9,000 per full-time student equivalent for their operations budgets, Title I tribal colleges receive only about \$3,916 per full-time student equivalent.

We cannot continue to ask tribal colleges to meet the needs of Indian country without adequate levels of funding. These students -- and these colleges -- deserve our encouragement and our support. The federal government needs to invest in these schools and bring them up to parity with mainstream community colleges. And the foundation of that investment must be a strong level of core operational funding in Title I & II.